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Review Article

EKA KUSTHA (PSORIASIS)- A COMPREHENSIVE REVIEW OF AYURVEDIC AND MODERN APPROACHES

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ABSTRACT

Psoriasis, known as *Eka Kustha* in Ayurveda, is a chronic inflammatory skin condition that arises from immune system dysfunction, characterized by red, scaly patches. This disorder significantly affects the quality of life of those diagnosed. Psoriasis is considered a multifactorial disease, affected by a combination of genetic predispositions, environmental triggers, and immune system factors. This review seeks to explore psoriasis comprehensively through both Ayurvedic and contemporary medical lenses, focusing on its underlying mechanisms, treatment options, and the effectiveness of various approaches. From an Ayurvedic viewpoint, *Eka Kustha* stems from an imbalance in the *Tridosha* system, which can be exacerbated by poor dietary choices and lifestyle habits. This imbalance leads to toxin build-up and diminishes proper immune function. Ayurvedic treatments emphasize detoxification methods such as *Panchakarma*, the use of herbal medicines, and dietary adjustments to restore balance among the *Doshas* and enhance overall wellness. Conversely, modern medicine approaches psoriasis as an autoimmune condition that entails an imbalance in T cell activity and cytokines, including TNF-α, IL-17, and IL-23. Treatment in conventional medicine encompasses a range of options from topical corticosteroids and systemic immunosuppressants to advanced therapies like biologics and phototherapy, aimed at alleviating symptoms and managing the disease. Nonetheless, these methods may present adverse effects and typically necessitate ongoing treatment. A comparative assessment of these two frameworks reveals that while modern medical interventions can provide swift symptom relief, Ayurvedic practices may deliver long-term advantages by tackling the fundamental causes of the disease and fostering immune balance. The potential integration of Ayurvedic detoxification techniques and herbal solutions with modern therapeutic advancements holds promise for enhancing patient outcomes. Further clinical investigations are necessary to develop evidence-based integrative treatment protocols for psoriasis, aiming for a comprehensive and sustainable approach to managing this condition.

INTRODUCTION

Psoriasis is a long-lasting inflammatory skin condition marked by red, scaly patches caused by the excessive growth of keratinocytes and disturbances in the immune system. This condition greatly affects individuals' quality of life, resulting in physical pain, mental stress, and social stigma. Additionally, psoriasis is linked to a range of systemic health issues, such as psoriatic arthritis, metabolic syndrome, cardiovascular diseases, and depression.[1] The precise origin of psoriasis is not completely understood; however, it is generally recognized that the condition involves an autoimmune aspect, which is affected by genetic factors and environmental stimuli. Contemporary medicine offers several treatment alternatives to manage symptoms and enhance the quality of life for patients. These options encompass topical treatments, systemic drugs, phototherapy, and biologic therapies. Nevertheless, these interventions frequently present

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challenges, including potential side effects and the requirement for ongoing treatment. [2]

From an Ayurvedic viewpoint, psoriasis is associated with a condition known as *Eka Kustha*, which is a specific type of *Kustha Roga*, or skin disorder. This condition arises due to an imbalance in the three *Doshas Vata, Pitta*, and *Kapha*. Ayurvedic literature points to several contributing factors, such as poor dietary choices, lifestyle habits, and the build-up of Ama, or toxins, which adversely affect skin health.[3] The Ayurvedic approach to managing psoriasis is holistic and includes strategies like detoxification *(Shodhana),* the use of herbal treatments, changes in diet, and lifestyle adjustments. The goal of these therapies is to restore the balance of the *Doshas*, enhance digestion, and improve immune functionality, potentially leading to long-lasting relief with minimal adverse effects. [4]

This review explores both Ayurvedic and modern medical perspectives on psoriasis, providing a comparative analysis of their treatment modalities. The aim is to highlight the strengths and limitations of each approach and explore the potential for integrative treatment strategies that combine the benefits of both systems for improved patient outcomes.

AIMS AND OBJECTIVES

- To analyze the Ayurvedic perspective on *Eka Kustha* (psoriasis) and its treatment approaches.
- To review modern medical advancements in psoriasis treatment, including pharmacological and biological therapies.
- To compare the effectiveness, benefits, and limitations of Ayurvedic and modern approaches.
- To explore the potential for integrative treatment strategies for better disease management.
- To identify future research directions in evidence-based Ayurvedic and modern psoriasis treatments.

MATERIALS AND METHODS

Literature Review: A comprehensive review of Ayurvedic classical texts, modern dermatology research papers, and clinical trial reports was conducted.

Data Sources: Articles from PubMed, Google Scholar, and Ayurvedic texts such as Charaka Samhita, Sushruta Samhita, and Ashtanga Hridaya were referenced.

Comparative Analysis: Ayurvedic treatments, including *Panchakarma* and herbal formulations, were compared with modern treatments like biologics, phototherapy, and immunosuppressant's.

Understanding Psoriasis

Definition and Types

Psoriasis is an autoimmune disorder characterized by the excessive growth of keratinocytes, which causes the development of thick, scaly patches on the skin. The main types of psoriasis include:

- Plaque Psoriasis, also known as Psoriasis Vulgaris, is the most prevalent form of psoriasis. It is characterized by the appearance of red patches covered with silver scales. [5]
- Guttate psoriasis is characterized by small, drop-shaped lesions that frequently arise following infections. [6]
- Inverse psoriasis is characterized by the presence of smooth, shiny lesions that typically occur in skin folds. [7]
- Pustular psoriasis is a skin condition that presents with white pustules encircled by areas of red, inflamed skin. [8]
- Erythrodermic Psoriasis: Severe, widespread redness and scaling, often requiring hospitalization.

Epidemiology

Psoriasis is a condition that impacts around 2-3% of people worldwide. It is believed to have a genetic basis and is found to be more common among those of European ancestry. The onset of the disease can occur at any age, but it typically peaks during the second and fifth decades of life. Additionally, psoriasis significantly influences psychological well-being, as it can lower self-esteem and elevate the chances of experiencing depression and anxiety disorders. [9]

Etiology and Pathogenesis

The exact cause of psoriasis is multifactorial, involving:

Genetic Factors: HLA-Cw6 allele is strongly linked to psoriasis.

Immune Dysregulation: Increased activity of T cells, particularly Th1 and Th17 subsets, results in the excessive production of cytokines such as TNF-α, IL-17, and IL-23, which in turn contributes to inflammatory processes. [10]

Environmental Triggers: Stress, infections, trauma, smoking, alcohol, and certain medications. [11]

Metabolic Connections: Psoriasis is frequently associated with metabolic syndrome, which elevates the likelihood of developing cardiovascular diseases and diabetes. [12]

Ayurvedic Perspective on Psoriasis

Concept of *Eka Kustha* in Ayurveda

Eka Kustha is a type of *Kshudra Kustha* (minor skin disease) mentioned in classical Ayurvedic texts. It is described as *"Aswedanam Mahavastu Matsya Shakalopamam,"* meaning non-exudative, large-sized lesions resembling fish scales. [13]

Etiology According to Ayurveda

Ayurveda attributes *Eka Kustha* to vitiation of the *Tridosha* (*Vata, Pitta, Kapha*) due to improper diet and lifestyle, such as:

- *Viruddhahara* refers to an incompatible diet that includes the combination of milk and fish, along with the consumption of excessive junk food and processed foods. [14]
- *Mithya Vihara* (Improper lifestyle): Sedentary habits, irregular sleep patterns.
- Psychological Influences: Stress and emotional disturbances can exacerbate the *Pitta* and *Vata doshas*, leading to the onset of skin conditions. [15]
- The build-up of *Ama* (toxins) occurs when digestion is compromised, resulting in an increase of toxins that exacerbate the *Doshas*. [16]

Ayurvedic Treatment Modalities

Shodhana (Detoxification Therapies)

***Panchakarma*:** *Vamana* (therapeutic emesis), *Virechana* (purgation), *Rakta Mokshana* (bloodletting).

***Takra Dhara*:** Buttermilk pouring therapy for cooling effect.

Shamana (Palliative Therapies)

Herbal Formulations: Neem, *Haridra* (turmeric), *Manjistha, Guduchi*, and *Khadir*.

External Applications: Ayurvedic *Lepas* (herbal pastes) like *Jatyadi Taila, Mahamarichyadi Taila*.

Dietary Modifications: Avoidance of incompatible foods, inclusion of bitter and cooling foods.

Yoga and Meditation: Practices like Pranayama and mindfulness reduce stress and improve disease outcomes.

Modern Approaches to Psoriasis

Pharmacological Treatments [17]

Topical Treatments: Corticosteroids, Vitamin D analogs (Calcipotriol), Calcineurin inhibitors.

Systemic Medications: Methotrexate, Cyclosporine, Acitretin for severe cases.

Newer Small Molecule Drugs: PDE4 inhibitors (Apremilast) and JAK inhibitors (Tofacitinib) are gaining prominence.

Biological Therapies [18]

- TNF-α Inhibitors: Infliximab, Etanercept, Adalimumab.
- IL-17/IL-23 Blockers: Secukinumab, Ustekinumab, Guselkumab.
- JAK Inhibitors: Tofacitinib, showing promising results.
- Precision Medicine: Research into targeted therapies based on genetic profiling is advancing.

Phototherapy [19]

Narrowband UVB Therapy: Effective in reducing inflammation and hyperproliferation.

PUVA Therapy: Combination of psoralen and UVA exposure.

Excimer Laser Therapy: A more focused approach to phototherapy with fewer side effects.

Comparative Analysis of Ayurvedic and Modern Approaches

Criteria	Ayurvedic Approach	Modern Approach
Treatment goal	Detoxification and *Dosha* balance	Immune modulation, inflammation control
Therapies	Herbal medicines, *Panchakarma*	Corticosteroids, biologics, phototherapy
Side effects	Minimal, if done correctly	Potential immunosuppression, liver toxicity
Duration	Longer but sustainable results	Faster but potential recurrence
Preventive care	Diet, lifestyle, Yoga	Limited to disease management

DISCUSSION

Managing psoriasis presents ongoing difficulties, given that it is a long-term condition necessitating continuous treatment. Contemporary medication options, such as corticosteroids, immunosuppressants, and biologics, can quickly alleviate symptoms; however, they also carry potential side effects, including liver damage, weakened immune response, and heightened vulnerability to infections. Phototherapy serves as a non-invasive alternative; however, it entails a series of treatments and may not be appropriate for every individual. [20] Ayurvedic therapies emphasize detoxification and immune modulation by employing methods such as *Panchakarma* and the use of herbal formulations. The primary goal of these treatments is to target the underlying causes of diseases rather than merely addressing their symptoms. Nevertheless, the absence of extensive clinical trials on Ayurvedic therapies hampers their broader acceptance within the medical field. [21]

A comparative analysis suggests that an integrative approach, combining Ayurvedic detoxification methods with modern biologic therapies, could provide enhanced disease management by reducing inflammation, improving immune balance, and minimizing side effects. Future research should focus on validating Ayurvedic therapies through clinical trials and exploring their synergistic effects with modern treatments.

CONCLUSION

Ayurvedic and modern medicine both provide important perspectives on managing psoriasis. Modern treatments are known for delivering quick relief, while Ayurveda emphasizes comprehensive, long-term healing methods. Combining Ayurveda's detoxification techniques with contemporary pharmacological advancements may result in improved outcomes. Future research should focus on examining the interaction between these two approaches, especially through clinical trials, to develop evidence-based integrative treatment protocols for psoriasis. Furthermore, integrating genomics and precision medicine into Ayurvedic diagnostic practices could lead to personalized treatment approaches, potentially increasing the effectiveness of therapies.

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